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# LIBRARY SERVICE TO LABOR

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## "WHEN WORK IS DONE"

### THE NEW YORK UNION ARTS AND CRAFTS EXHIBIT, 1953

This is a report of progress, and I mean progress. From our small uncertain beginning last year, the arts and crafts exhibition of leisure time activities of trade unions, "When Work is Done," grew this year into a sturdy man-sized show. We outgrew the third floor of one of our branch libraries and had to hire a regular art gallery, which was in turn taxed to the limit. More than five hundred individual trade union members showed the work which they had produced in their leisure time, either in class or on their own.

This included an even wider variety of handicrafts than the year before. Elevator operators exhibited model airplanes, ships and matchstick forts. Seamen entered hand carved pipestands and string knotted belts. An electrical worker from Ireland displayed his handmade silver ornaments and shoes which he used as part of his bagpipers costume. Teachers and nurses had paintings and needle work. Photo engravers and lithographers had remarkable displays of paintings. The garment workers, in addition to their display of paintings and varieties of handicraft had a particularly beautiful display of sculpture. A maintenance painter entered a striking portrait of John L. Lewis modelled in plaster. There were cartoons by a changemaker in the subway system and a book written by a machinist.

The CIO was represented this year by three of their national affiliates, in contrast to their one local CIO affiliate last year. Ten of the others were affiliates of the American Federation of Labor. Also represented was the Woman's Trade Union League. While the general attendance did not come up to expectation, it more than doubled last year's and represented a wider range of interest, including more of the general public.

There are many exciting chapters in the story of the exhibition but this is not the time nor the place for their telling. Rather we want to ask and to try to answer a question that has been troubling us ever since the exhibition began. What does it mean in terms of the Library and in terms of the unions? We realize that there can be no firm answer either for the one question or the other but there are some partial answers for each. The opening session perhaps furnishes the keynote to the whole business. Mathew Woll, vice president of the American Federation of Labor, Morris Iushewitz, secretary-treasurer of the New York City CIO Council, and Dr. Horace M. Kallen of the New School for Social Research, a well-known authority in adult education, were the three speakers. They were introduced by John M. Cory, chief of the Circulation Department of The New York Public Library. Present were

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some three hundred members of fourteen organizations, not to mention members of the public at large. Each of the speakers emphasized the importance of this enterprise as a means of effecting greater understanding between members of different unions; of giving unions a chance to demonstrate to their members that they are concerned with their leisure time as well as with their work time. They also agreed that it seemed highly appropriate that the public library, which is dedicated to promoting the cultural life of the citizen, should be the agency that acts simultaneously as the catalyst and as the amalgam for this experiment.

Nor do these seem to have been merely pious words. The reactions of the groups, not to say the individuals, during the exhibition and since indicate that the experiment has not been carried out in a vacuum. For instance, during the show the head of one of the unions on five different occasions brought key people to see this demonstration of cooperation among trade unions. A member, whose paintings were exhibited by his union, was disturbed that his group had made such a poor showing and determined to organize an art society from which they could choose work next year. Another union is going to run an arts and crafts competition in its own union in order to obtain a wider selection for its showing in next year's exhibition. Many individuals came back again and again to show their friends and relatives their handiwork. Thus we see that the exhibition had an impact upon the participating unions and upon their members.

What about the impact upon the Library? There can be little doubt about its value to our special service to trade unions. By means of the exhibition, we have become firmly established in the minds of many of the union officials as well as in the minds of many of their members. In two years, we have accomplished far more than we could have through publicity and talk. Library Service to Trade Unions is a concrete experience for all these people. Nor is this concretization of the idea of

#### LIBRARY SERVICE TO LABOR

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The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent the policy or views of the Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups. Contributions of news and articles are welcomed by the editor.

library service limited to that of the special trade union phase. Strangely enough, the fact that the exhibition was not within library walls added rather than detracted. Our very handsome display which centered around the idea of adult education activities of The New York Public Library stimulated questions of all kinds. People applied for library cards, asked how they could get some of the books on display, where they could learn about classes on arts and crafts. The film showings gave us a chance to talk about our film service and program planning activity. The library was a living thing. It gave them something more than books. It came to meet them on their own grounds - on neutral territory.

True, all this took a tremendous amount of time and effort; but the investment seems to have paid dividends. As already indicated, throughout the time of the exhibition, the unions were talking about "next year." Throughout, our answer was "Next year? Yes, if the unions will take greater responsibility both in time and money."

To discover whether the unions really meant business, we recently called a meeting of representatives from all the participating organizations, to discuss "next year." Six sent representatives, three more phoned the last minute to apologize for not being able to be present and practically all the rest indicated an active interest. At the meeting, tentative plans were worked out for setting up a permanent organization to stage an annual arts and crafts exhibition. This organization is to consist of a Board of Directors representing the participating unions; a treasury contributed to by each; and a part time paid executive secretary to assist me. The plan is for me to continue to act as "chairman" and to have The New York Public Library continue to be headquarters.

Although it is too soon to say that the unions are prepared to accept these proposed plans, indications are that the show will go on. To each it has a different meaning; but underlying all these is the chance for union members to demonstrate to themselves, to each other, and to the public that they are no less interested in the cultural well-being of their members than are such community agencies as the public library.

Dorothy Kuhn Oko, In Charge  
Library Service to Trade Unions  
The New York Public Library

#### LABOR EXHIBIT AT THE CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY

A very successful labor exhibit was held during the month of September at The Chicago Public Library. Participating were the American Federation of Labor, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, and the railroad brotherhoods, all of whom cooperated most cordially. The exhibit was planned to depict the activities of labor unions through their publications.

Irwin Klass, editor of the Federation News, Peter Bockstahler, president of the Chicago Union Label and Service Trades Council and Eleanor Mueller, its secretary-treasurer, volunteered personally to collect material at various union functions and to obtain it from member unions. Through their efforts a truly formidable array of annual and special reports, bulletins, and periodicals was assembled from all over the United States. The regional director of the CIO, Frank Cronin, sent a special letter to all member CIO unions and to the Iowa and Illinois CIO councils urging participation and directing that material be sent to the undersigned. The

railroad brotherhoods were approached individually by letter.

The response was prompt and thorough. All together about five hundred pieces of material, ranging from mimeographed releases to large bound volumes, poured in. Most of this was readily divided into such categories as histories, constitutions and by-laws, health and welfare plans, educational and community activities, public relations, union label work, and periodicals. Under these headings, the pamphlets and other unbound publications were fastened to display boards in such a way that they could be examined by those who wished to see more than the cover. Books were displayed in a locked glass case. A separate display of union buttons and labels was furnished by the Chicago Union Label and Service Trades Council.

Excellent publicity brought the project to the attention of the public. Two metropolitan dailies carried announcements and one took pictures. Spot announcements were made over two radio stations. The Chicago Federation News published a story with a picture and the American Federationist carried an announcement. The Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America took a picture which was published in the Advance. The Trade Association Executives Forum, an organization of secretaries of national trade associations, urged its members to attend the exhibit.

At the 1953 AFL convention in St. Louis a special report was made and the exhibit was hailed as an example of how to bring the trade union movement story to the general public. A resolution was passed recommending that the American Library Association be urged to promote cooperation between libraries and local labor bodies in the matter of such displays.

Not only labor leaders, but a large segment of the general public saw the display and stopped to browse. There were many expressions of interest and surprise at the varied activities revealed and the quality and attractiveness of the publications. There is no doubt also that the exhibit was a means of bringing the Chicago Public Library and its services to the attention of individual members as well as officers of unions. The Library collections benefited also since we were able to keep for our files all of the material sent to us.

Irene H. Peterson, Chief  
Business & Civics Department  
The Chicago Public Library

#### NEWS FROM LIBRARIES AND UNIONS

Labor Scholarships Abroad is the subject of a recent pamphlet issued by the American Labor Education Service. The pamphlet describes scholarships open to American workers for study abroad including Fulbright scholarships, Ruskin scholarships at Oxford, Coleg Harlech in Wales, and others. A copy of the pamphlet may be obtained for ten cents from the ALES, 1776 Broadway, New York 19.

A cooperative project for producing educational filmstrips for use with labor groups has been proposed by a group of union education directors. Arthur A. Elder, director of the ILGWU Training Institute, is chairman of the temporary committee.

Elizabeth Dorsey is head of the newly organized Business and Labor Department of the Grosvenor Library, Buffalo, New York.

Mrs. Dorothy Kuhn Oke, in charge of Library Service to Trade Unions, New York Public Library, is the new chairman of the Joint Committee on Library Service to



Labor Groups. She replaces Ruth Shapiro, Milwaukee Public Library, who will remain a member of the Committee. Mrs. Helen F. Hirson of the Boston Public Library is the new member of the Committee.

The International Labor Directory (second edition) will contain a section on library service to labor groups. If you have not already received a questionnaire from the publisher, write to the Frederick A. Praeger Press, 105 W. 40th Street, New York 18.

Syracuse, N. Y. Public Library reports the waiving of residence requirements in order to serve all industrial workers in the area. Railway mail clerks, stopping in Syracuse between runs, are also served by the Library.

The Massachusetts Federation of Labor has secured the cooperation of public libraries in that state in assisting high school students in locating material on the American labor movement in preparation for scholarship examinations. The State Federation offers two college scholarships, and local labor bodies in Massachusetts offer a total of eight scholarships to high school students. The Workers Education Bureau of the AFL has recently published a mimeographed list of scholarships offered by AFL unions.

Brooklyn Public Library recently featured a two-week "Let's Look at Labor" program, including exhibits, talks, and book lists.

Mrs. Dorothy Kuhn Oko served as resources person on Library Service to Labor at the recent meeting of the Adult Education Association. She reports that a number of public libraries, now without formal programs for labor groups, expressed an interest in developing such services.

How Public Libraries Are Serving Business and Labor is the subject of an article in the October 1953 issue of the Industrial Bulletin of the New York State Department of Labor.

A "Film a Month" program has recently been set up by the Workers Education Bureau. The program is designed to make films available on a reduced rental basis and on a date each month designated by the borrowing group. A total of 16 films are available under this program.

Literature on older workers and ways in which the public library can serve older citizens are presented in a series of articles in the November 1 issue of Library Journal. In one article Mrs. Helen F. Hirson, in charge of the Boston Public Library's program for labor groups, discusses that Library's work with the "Never Too Late Group," composed of men and women sixty years of age and over.